

## Turning Theology: A Proposal

**M. Shawn Copeland**

Boston College, USA

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### Abstract

Drawing out Stephen Bevans's thesis that Christian theologizing has never been an exclusively European project, this article proposes that theologians working within the context of the United States turn their theological praxis to consideration of persons in all our splendid, impoverished, joyous, sobering, and diverse humanity. The article accords particular attention to cultural pluralism and interculturality along with transdisciplinary methods of theologizing. Given the violent public activity of white racist supremacist groups and individuals along with the barrage of racist verbal assaults and tweets by high-ranking officials, theology's active and public defense of human persons has never been more necessary.

### Keywords

colonialism, culture pluralism, interculturality, empire, genocide, globalization, modernity, persons, racism, social inequality, theological praxis

There is no innocent theology.

—*Gustavo Gutiérrez*

Our past is sedimented in our present,

And we are doomed to misidentify ourselves

As long as we can't do justice to where we come from.

—*Charles Taylor*

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### Corresponding author:

M. Shawn Copeland, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA 02467, USA

Email: copeland@bc.edu

As faithful disciples of the Jewish Jesus of Nazareth, how are we to contribute to his mission through our intellectual praxis at this moment in history? To begin to answer this question, I will identify, probe, and reassess some of the challenges that global social (i.e., political, economic, technological), cultural, demographic, and ecological change presents for the tasks and responsibilities of Catholic theologians in the United States. Equally pertinent to this effort are those cultural and racial-ethnic shifts within the US Catholic population as well as the wider national population. Data from the Pew Research Center indicate that in the “global North” Christians comprise 69 percent of the population and that the US ranks first among the top ten countries with the largest number of Christians.<sup>1</sup> As of December 31, 2015, the Roman Catholic Church worldwide claims 1.285 billion adherents, roughly half the total of all Christians. In the US, Roman Catholics comprise 24 percent of the population.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, during the past two or three years, many US citizens have responded to the immigration of diverse peoples, particularly those of Hispanic/Latinx and Central American heritage,<sup>3</sup> with anxiety, consternation, and sometimes violence.<sup>4</sup> How does our national response to immigration relate to the priorities of our work as women and men who are culturally, racial-ethnically, and intellectually diverse Roman Catholic theologians?

I address these concerns in three parts. The first is deeply indebted to and appreciative of the pioneering work of Stephan Bevans who argues that “Christian theologizing is not now and never has been a monolithic, purely *Western* reality, but from the beginning has been pluriform and multicultural in shape,”<sup>5</sup> and attentive to and responsive to the context from which it emerges.<sup>6</sup> The second considers theology in relation

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1. The report identifies the other nine, in order, as Brazil, Mexico, Russia, Philippines, Nigeria, China, Democratic Republic of Congo, Germany, and Ethiopia. Conrad Hackett and Brian J. Grim, *Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population* (Washington, DC: Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project Pew Research Center, December 19, 2011), 11, <https://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-exec/>.
  2. The 2017 *Vatican Yearbook* (2017 *Annuario Pontificio*) reports that the countries with the most Catholics are, in order: Brazil, Mexico, Philippines, United States, Italy, France, Colombia, Spain, Congo, and Argentina. See Holy See Press Office, “The Pontifical Yearbook 2017 and the ‘Annuarium Statisticum Ecclesiae’ 2015,” news release, April 6, 2017, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2017/04/06/170406e.html>.
  3. See Anthony B. Pinn and Benjamin Valentín, eds., *Creating Ourselves: African American and Hispanic Americans on Popular Culture and Religious Expression* (Chapel Hill: Duke University Press, 2009); Richard Rodriguez, *Brown: The Last Discovery of America* (New York: Penguin, 2002); Orlando O. Espin and Miguel H. Diaz, eds., *From the Heart of Our People: Latino/a Explorations in Catholic Systematic Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999).
  4. The list of egregious events forms a catalogue of racial, religious, and gender terrorism.
  5. Stephen B. Bevans, An Introduction to Theology in *Global Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009), 205, emphasis original; Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2013); Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985).
  6. My use of the term “context” purposively admits of multiple meanings, e.g., apologetic, cultural, geographical, modernity, colonialism, etc.

to the context of globalization. The third advances a proposal for reorienting our theological praxis in and for our country and its diverse peoples for the whole Body of Christ.

## Theology as Plural in Form, Culture, and Context

Our current intellectual concern about change in theology is neither the first nor the only (and not the last) geo-social, cultural, and racial-ethnic shift in the development of Christianity and Christian theology. Recall that a small Jewish sect, originating in the first half of the first century, animated by radical recommitment to a way of life in honor of the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, assembled around Jesus of Nazareth—who was crucified as messiah, believed to be raised from the dead, and confessed as divine—eventually “spread along the eastern Mediterranean and Red Sea coastlands of north and northeast Africa.”<sup>7</sup> As Christianity grew and spread, it drew together women and men from many sectors of the then-known world to forge our discipline—theology as a questioning, reasoned effort to clarify, to understand, to verify, to formulate, to explain, to communicate what it is that Christians think, believe, and practice. Recall that during the first four centuries of Christianity, North Africa (including Egypt) produced some of our most influential and most controversial theologians, including Origen, Tertullian, and Augustine,<sup>8</sup> as well as other early thinkers and writers.<sup>9</sup>

The seventh-century appearance of Islam brought about decisive geopolitical and cultural consequences for Christianity and its theology. “In a few decades,” Bevans argues, “much of Christian Africa and western Asia became Muslim, the Roman Empire in the East was confined to the Byzantine Empire, and Islam had conquered much of the Iberian Peninsula.”<sup>10</sup> But the growth of Islam did not mean the end of Christianity, and “vital Christian communities in Ethiopia, Egypt, and Syria” have

7. Thomas Speak, “African Christianity,” *Oxford Bibliographies* (April 28, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780199846733-0105>. This region includes the whole or large areas of countries we know today as Cyprus, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Egypt, and Ethiopia; see Mark Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 22.

8. Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 1–2; see also Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995); Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture Upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999).

9. These include Syrian theologians Tatian, Ephrem, and Aphrahat; Athanasius of Alexandria, Gregory of Nazianzus, and those brilliant siblings of Nyssa—Gregory, Macrina, and Basil; Jerome, Marcella, Paula, Melania, and Eustochium. Remember Patrick, Benedict, Gregory; Boethius, Maximus the Confessor, and John of Damascus; Alopen; Bede and Alcuin of York. See Bevans, *An Introduction to Theology*, 217–18, 221–24, 230–32, 233–35. This narrative follows Bevans quite closely.

10. Bevans, *An Introduction to Theology*, 233.

held their ground for centuries.<sup>11</sup> During its first thousand years, Christian theology was international and *catholic*, intercultural and pluriform, and included contributions by women. But, increasingly Christian thinkers and clerics isolated, metaphorized, and contemptibly enclosed Christianity's Semitic origins within the Vulgate; pruned its African and Syriac roots; and conjoined (perhaps, better, subordinated) its identity, nearly exhaustively, almost exclusively to Greco-Roman culture and philosophy.

The second millennium of Christianity witnessed three major divisions within the church, two of which continue to impact the present: the Great Schism of 1054 and the rift between Catholics and Protestants in 1517.<sup>12</sup> Mark Noll contends that the former "brought to a head centuries of East–West cultural disengagement, theological differences, and ecclesiastical suspicion."<sup>13</sup> These cultural and intellectual differences were discernible already in the first century in distinctive approaches to Christian life and theology; in the centuries that followed, these tendencies would become intensified by historical events. In Noll's characterization, the Latin approach was practical, and theological thought was responsive to the influence of Roman legal and juridical ideas, while the Greek approach was more speculative and situated theological thought in prayer, worship, and liturgy.<sup>14</sup> Greek and Latin churches adopted dissimilar styles of ecclesial leadership. The East dealt "collegially" with a strong emperor, and the laity made considerable contributions to theology; given a "context of fragmented political leadership," the West treated leadership and governance much more hierarchically and clerics controlled theology.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, significant theological differences separated the Western and Eastern churches—the addition of the term *filioque* to the Nicene Creed and insistence on papal supremacy. At the same time, geopolitical and cultural forces played a decisive role in congealing hierarchical, liturgical, and theological positions: repeated armed incursions, imperial abuse of power, and corruption of the military within the Western Roman Empire;<sup>16</sup> the expansion of Islam outward from "the Arabian world across North Africa [to] control communications on the

11. Bevens, *An Introduction to Theology*, 233.

12. Bevens, *An Introduction to Theology*, 239. The third division was the Great Western Schism of 1378–1417 (the "Babylonian Captivity") occasioned by the move of the papacy to Avignon during turmoil in Rome. In the effort to return the administrative seat of the Western church to Rome, rival popes came forward from rival groups of cardinals. This nearly forty-year old sordid affair was resolved at the Council of Constance with the resignation of claimants to the papacy and the election of Martin V; see also Noll, *Turning Points*, 175–76.

13. Noll, *Turning Points*, 125.

14. Noll, *Turning Points*, 126–27.

15. Noll, *Turning Points*, 130.

16. Glen W. Bowersock contests the conventional paradigm of the "fall" of the Roman Empire: "The constant transformation of cultures and *polities* within the geographical frame of the Roman Empire, as well as the successful assimilation of diverse languages and peoples, seemed rather to illustrate the fecundity and richness of what that empire had created." Bowersock, "The Vanishing Paradigm of the Fall of Rome," *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 49 (1996): 29–43 at 31, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3824699>.

Mediterranean Sea,” the advance of Turkish forces on the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire, and the Crusades.<sup>17</sup>

The second millennium holds up to us women and men who “thought through the Christian gospel in their own times and with their own faith.”<sup>18</sup> These include such women and men as Bernard and Scholastica, Francis and Clare, Dominic and Ignatius of Loyola; Scotus, Peter Lombard, Anselm of Canterbury, Peter Abelard, Aquinas,<sup>19</sup> Bonaventure, Ramón Llull,<sup>20</sup> and Gregory of Palamas; Julian of Norwich, Hildegard of Bingen, Catherine of Siena, Meister Eckhart, Teresa of Avila, and John of the Cross, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, and Richard Hooker, Erasmus, Sor Juana de la Cruz, Matteo Ricci, Robert de Nobili, and Melchior Cano. On the theological register, their names signal seriousness of purpose and courage, dynamism and originality, intellectual acumen and innovation, creativity and mystical insight, zeal and holy boldness for the Gospel, love of God and love of the “other.” Yet, these women and men were not flawless: stubbornness fanned flames of misogyny, bigotry, and persecution of “others”—Muslims, peasants, non-believers, putative heretics. Fear stifled change, ingenuity, and possibility, and arrogance overestimated experience, understanding, and judgment. The prevailing orientation of Christian theology was Neoplatonic and Augustinian. Through his critical appropriation, selection, adaptation, and deployment of Aristotle’s thought, Aquinas changed this. Of the consequences of this change Thomas O’Meara writes,

For the third time, after Origen in the third century and Augustine in the fifth, the Christian faith perceived that it could employ (but not be absorbed by) the ideas of a new age, culture, and science. The struggle of the thirteenth century swirled around Aristotle, because he brought a spirit of criticism over against piety, a realism in the structure of the human personality over against the reduction of faith or grace to signs or stories. The instincts and faculties of human life enhanced (but did not replace) the world of grace and faith. Faith was

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17. Noll, *Turning Points*, 127–32. Noll quotes Steven Runciman: “There never was a greater crime against humanity than the Fourth Crusade. Not only did it cause the destruction or dispersal of all the treasures of the past that Byzantium had devotedly stored, and the moral wounding of a civilization that was still active and great; but it was also an act of gigantic political folly. It brought no help to the Christians in Palestine. . . . In the wide sweep of world history, the effects were wholly disastrous. . . . [In] the hearts of the Eastern Christians the schism was complete, irremediable, and final” (131).
18. Bevens, *An Introduction to Theology*, 239.
19. In addition to critical appropriation of and engagement with the thought of Aristotle, Aquinas’s work demonstrates evidence of engagement with the writings of Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides (1138–1204) and Muslim philosopher Avicenna or Ibn Sina (980–1037).
20. Bevens identifies Spanish layman Ramón Llull (1235–1315) as “the most prolific writer in dialogue with Islam” during the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries and perhaps “the first theologian who reflected systematically on the church’s mission”; Bevens, *An Introduction to Theology*, 250. As Bevens points out, this kind of dialogue is *not* the kind of interreligious dialogue in which Christians engage today, but it does register the effort of Christians to engage in conversation with persons of other faith.

not just religious information about curious mysteries, but a knowing supported by the will, a cognition which gave access to a real world.<sup>21</sup>

Bevans concludes that by 1500, “Christianity was for the *first time a Western religion*.”<sup>22</sup> Although Islam and China still claimed attention, with the dissolution of the Eastern (Byzantine) Roman Empire, Western Europe now emerged as the center of gravity of world power.<sup>23</sup> Having migrated some two or three centuries earlier from the monasteries, theology now settled down firmly, perhaps even comfortably, within the universities. Indeed, the first fifteen hundred years of Christianity and its theologies handed on the faith, animated and transmitted tradition, shaped and reshaped the papacy, vivified Christian spirituality, and sustained intellectual life. Yet, by the close of that century, theology had grown, and not without cause, defensive and reactionary: buttressing ecclesial authority against what was perceived as hostile and interfering rulers as well as movements for internal reform; formulating an ecclesiology focused on structure and hierarchy, protocol and order; refining doctrine; and articulating a sacramental theology that “stressed eucharistic presence and priestly powers of consecration and absolution, but rather downplayed Christian baptismal dignity and responsibilities.”<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps apologetics may serve as one way of characterizing the context for the first thousand years of Christian theology. The intensification of Roman oppression and the destruction of the Temple altered the course of the development of Judaism. Those men and women who believed Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah of God separated themselves from the religious life they had known and cherished. Now, they acted on their own to form something new, to make sense of it, to gather other Jews, and then Gentiles, into the service of its mission, to establish and to sustain a tradition, to formulate a theology, to generate a framework for organization and growth.<sup>25</sup> The notion of Christendom may best express the context of theology for the next five hundred years (1000–1500). As Noll puts it, “For all its failures, medieval Christendom remained a powerful ideal. At the heart of the ideal was the comprehensive presence of divine grace in all of life. And at the heart of the ideal in practice was the harmonious cooperation of the rulers of church and state.”<sup>26</sup>

Yet, that ideal was just that—an ideal—and it foundered and collapsed in the closing decade of the fifteenth century as Christianity and theology came into “critical encounter with empire.”<sup>27</sup> Of course, this was not the first time Christianity and

21. Thomas O’Meara, *Thomas Aquinas, Theologian* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 26–27.

22. Bevans, *An Introduction to Theology*, 257; italics mine.

23. Bevans, *An Introduction to Theology*, 257; emphasis original.

24. Bevans, *An Introduction to Theology*, 257–58.

25. Noll, *Turning Points*, 17.

26. Noll, *Turning Points*, 117.

27. Joerg Rieger, *Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 6.

theology had “felt the pressures to assimilate to the force fields”<sup>28</sup> of empire. But this new encounter was far-reaching:

Christianity became, with the expulsion of Jews and Moors and the “discovery” of America, the first global design of the modern colonial world system and, consequently, the anchor of Occidentalism and the coloniality of power drawing the external borders as the colonial difference, which became reconverted and resemantized in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries with the expansion of Britain and France to Asia and Africa. Global designs are the complement of universalism in the making of the modern/colonial world.<sup>29</sup>

Over the next several hundred years, Christian religion and theology were ensnared deeply, dramatically, destructively in colonial exploration and expropriation, slavery and erotic violence. Not for the first time, the context for theology coalesced as empire and charted a course into the modern colonial world.<sup>30</sup> Christianization was equated with Europeanization—indigenous peoples were to assimilate *as* and *to* the Spanish or Portuguese or English or French ways of living and doing, worshipping and praying. As Christian theology waded through the resulting thicket of human suffering, some theologians and evangelizers substituted conventional cultural mores, ways of thinking, moral behavior, and devotional practices for the truth of the Gospel. These included prominent defenders of the right of “new world” conquest and colonization—Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, and even Francisco de Vitoria.<sup>31</sup> But there also were, in the Southern hemisphere, men who recalibrated culture and mores, ways of thinking and behaving, ways of worship and practices in light of the Gospel. These men defended the indigenous peoples and their rights as human beings—Bartolomé de Las Casas, Pedro de Córdoba, Antón de Montesinos.<sup>32</sup> In the Northern hemisphere, racial and cultural animus along with political stratagems and military might compromised the evangelizing work of John Eliot, Pierre-Jean De Smet, Henry Benjamin Whipple,

28. Rieger, *Christ and Empire*, 5.

29. Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 21.

30. Between 1415 and the 1470s, the Portuguese explored the African coast, and the first enslaved Africans were sold by Portugal in 1441. On March 31, 1492, Isabella I and Ferdinand II issued the “Edict of Expulsion of the Jews” requiring the deportation of observant Jews from the Kingdoms of Castile and Aragon and its territories and possessions by July 31 of that year. The decree putatively aimed to ensure the fidelity of recent Jewish converts to Christianity, but the confiscation of Jewish property and land insinuated ignoble motives. This edict was formally revoked on December 16, 1968, following the Second Vatican Council. See, Hans Koning, *Columbus: His Enterprise* (New York: Monthly Review, 1976); Enrique Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of “the Other” and the Myth of Modernity*, trans. Michael D. Barber (New York: Continuum, 1995).

31. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 149–50, 151–60, 181–82, 219–41.

32. Bevans, *An Introduction to Theology*, 259–60; Todorov, *The Conquest of America*, 134–38, 142; Rieger, *Christ and Empire*, 159–96.

even Junípero Serra.<sup>33</sup> Concerning conquest and colonization, the Gospel and genocide, theology and evangelization, George Tinker notes:

Even those missionary “heroes” who are most revered in modern memory, from Las Casas in the south to John Eliot in the north, conspired with the political power of the colonial oppressors to deprive Indian people of their cultures, destroy native economies, and reduce culturally indigenous communities to subservient dependence—all for the sake of the “gospel” and with the best of intentions.<sup>34</sup>

The biting irony of Tinker’s comment does not obscure its poignancy. The determined, misguided, willful, ambiguous collusion of Christian theology in the destruction and dehumanization of peoples, particularly women and peoples of color, is the story of the “conscripts of modernity.”<sup>35</sup>

Overemphasis on modernity’s “emancipative, rational, enlightened (*aufgeklärt*) nucleus” too often occludes the mistreatment of those conscripts—the Indians, Africans, *mestizos*.<sup>36</sup> Theology in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries oriented itself to the philosophic concerns of the Enlightenment, particularly as these were mediated through the work of Kant and Hegel,<sup>37</sup> although Catholics and Protestants responded to each philosopher’s program differently. Some Catholic theologians expressed openness to the new philosophy and its emphasis on science, human reason, experience, and individualism. But, the ecclesiastical or institutional church still reeled from the blow dealt by the French Revolution and the sting of American revolutionary ideas of liberty, equality, and democracy. Protestants were no less wary, but responded

33. George E. Tinker, *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993); see also J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

34. George E. Tinker, *Spirit and Resistance: Political Theology and American Indian Liberation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 103.

35. See David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Chapel Hill: Duke University Press, 2004). Of the peoples whom colonialism made wretched, Dussel writes, the Indians “had to recompose entirely their existence to endure the inhuman oppression that was their lot as the first victims of modernity,” the Africans unlike any “other people in human history and in such numbers were reified as merchandise,” and the *mestizos* “live in their own flesh the contradictory tension of modernity as both emancipation and sacrificial myth.” Dussel, *The Invention of America*, 122, 124–25.

36. Dussel, *The Invention of America*, 120.

37. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze collects, edits, and comments on the work of several important Enlightenment philosophers, including Kant and Hegel, and interrogates how “the concept of race gained such currency in the European Enlightenment scientific and socio-political discourse”; in Eze, *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1997), 4. Likewise, Susan Buck-Morss charges, “In regard to the abolition of slavery, Hegel’s retreat from revolutionary radicalism was clear”; Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), 67.



favorably to a range of issues including science and human experience, theology of history, eschatology, and Christology. Representative thinkers of this period include Friedrich Schleiermacher and Søren Kierkegaard; Adolf Harnack, Ernest Troeltsh, and David Strauss; Johann Sebastian Drey, Johann Adam Möhler, and Joseph Kleutgen;<sup>38</sup> Alfred Loisy, George Tyrrell, Friedrich von Hügel, and John Henry Newman;<sup>39</sup> Pierre Rousselot, Joseph Marechal, Jacques Maritain, and Etienne Gilson;<sup>40</sup> Jonathan Edwards, Orestes Brownson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walter Rauschenbusch, and William James.<sup>41</sup>

Aidan Nichols considers the “eighteenth century [as] perhaps the least creative of the modern centuries for Catholic theology.”<sup>42</sup> During this period, the use of “theological manuals” displaced the *Summa Theologiae* as the basic seminary text. The aim of the manual, Bevans observes, “was not so much to help students understand the faith or think theologically for themselves, but to pass on the correct teaching of the church as articulated at Trent and against Protestantism.”<sup>43</sup> If the theology of the eighteenth century did not dazzle, aesthetic expression flourished and may have offered, as Bevans suggests, “the best theological reflection of the age.”<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, the theology that emerged during the nineteenth century creatively pursued new methods of biblical interpretation and engaged the notion of doctrinal development.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, during these two centuries, colonial expansion remained the context for Christian missionary activity and theology.

As alternate, indeed, substantive accounts attest, the development of Christian theology is richer, deeper, and more complex than what is summarized here.<sup>46</sup> Much too little has been said about the shape and condition of theology among Protestants, the

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38. See Bradford E. Hinze, *Narrating History, Developing Doctrine: Friedrich Schleiermacher and Johann Sebastian Drey* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1993); Donald J. Dietrich and Michael J. Himes, eds., *The Legacy of the Tübingen School: The Relevance of Nineteenth-Century Theology for the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Crossroads, 1997).

39. See Bernard M. G. Reardon, *Roman Catholic Modernism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1970); James C. Livingston, *The Enlightenment and the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 1, *Modern Christian Thought*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006).

40. See Gerald McCool, *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999); McCool, *Catholic Theology in the Nineteenth Century: The Quest for a Unitary Method* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1977).

41. See Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1956); Lawrence Buell, ed., *The American Transcendentalists: Essential Writings* (New York: Random House, 2006).

42. Aidan Nichols, *The Shape of Catholic Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1991), 321.

43. Bevans, *An Introduction to Theology*, 278.

44. Bevans, *An Introduction to Theology*, 293–94. This was the era of J. S. Bach (*St. Matthew Passion*, *St. John Passion*), Handel (*Messiah*), and Mozart (*Requiem*), Baroque art (e.g., Bernini, Rembrandt, Velázquez), and Rococo art (e.g., Watteau, Fragonard).

45. Bevans, *An Introduction to Theology*, 294.

46. For example, Andrew F. Wall, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002).

Eastern Orthodox Church as well as the churches of North Africa, Russia, China, and Japan. Still, this sketch reminds us that neither Christianity nor Christian theology have ever been monolithic or purely and exclusively European. Rather, from the outset, Christianity and theology have been pluriform, culturally diverse, and plural, even at times intercultural and contextual. Moreover, theologians have never been completely separate from their sociocultural, racial-ethnic communities and historical and geopolitical contexts; theologians have always been diverse in thought (in understanding, judgment, and decision), in sociocultural, racial-ethnic heritage, and in geopolitical contexts. Uncritical acceptance of the paradigm of Christianity as a purely European reality has had grave consequences for theology, for Christian believers, and for peoples pushed either to the periphery or beyond the boundaries.<sup>47</sup> Critical Catholic theological awareness of this problematic coincides with the Second Vatican Council as “the Church’s first official self-actualization as a world Church.”<sup>48</sup>

## Theology in The Context of Globalization

In the past half century, the notion and processes of globalization have commanded an increasingly prominent role in contemporary political, economic, cultural, and religious analyses. Globalization emerges as an ambiguous, ambivalent, even slippery notion: In common sense usage, the term “globe” often serves as a geographic synonym for “world” or “earth,” the planet which we *homo sapiens* inhabit along with varieties of species. When academics, essayists, writers, or journalists suggest that human beings live in a “global village,” they urge us to consider the fragility of our planet and to acknowledge the intricate interdependence of the many and varied life

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47. Noll writes: “The long dominance of Christianity in Europe, the extraordinary power of Christendom as a cultural, political, artistic and social ideal; the sustaining presence of the Roman Catholic Church as the world’s oldest continuously functioning international institution; and the economic and political influence of Europe around the globe since the late fifteenth century—all can leave the impression that there is something intrinsically European about Christian faith. Generations of Europeans sailing off into the world at large certainly acted as if they thought so, while generations of non-Europeans understandably received the same impression. . . . Similarly, in the recent past, the adolescent exuberance of the United States as the world’s newest global power has often left the same impression. Where the United States has gone, Christianity defined as an American religion has gone before, accompanied or followed closely thereafter. . . . The impression that Christianity in its essence is either European or American is, however, simply false.” Mark Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith* (Downers Gove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 191.

48. Karl Rahner, “Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II,” *Theological Studies* 40 (1979): 716–27 at 718, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056397904000404>; see also Rahner, *The Shape of the Church to Come*, trans. Edward Quinn (Philadelphia: Seabury, 1974).

forms it hosts. This phrase also functions to compress and illustrate social inequalities around the world.<sup>49</sup>

Technical usage distinguishes globalization-from-above and globalization-from-below.<sup>50</sup> The former seeks to amass and concentrate cultural and social wealth and power in groups and organizations that utilize their control of human and material resources to expand their wealth and power (domination). This form of globalization transfers power and resources from the natural world to human control, from local communities to transnational elites, from local societies to transnational power centers. Globalization-from-above promotes free-market economic neoliberalism and promises economic prosperity; but in the main, it has delivered impoverishment and intensified social polarization between the “global” elites and the “global” poor.<sup>51</sup> Further, this transnational set-up has spawned an international (transnational) division of labor through which so-called “third world” countries are assigned roles to provide

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49. See “100 People: A World Portrait,” [https://www.100people.org/statistics\\_detailed\\_statistics.php](https://www.100people.org/statistics_detailed_statistics.php). In 1990, Donella Meadows inspired this mapping of human diversity and social inequalities. It was been updated in 1992 by Returning Peace Corps Volunteers of Madison, Wisconsin, *Unheard Voices: Celebrating Cultures from the Developing World*; in 2006 by Jon A. Vonk; and in 2016 by Fritz Erickson. “If the World were 100 People: *Gender*: 50 would be female, 50 would be male; *Age*: 25 would be 0–14, 66 would be 15–64, 9 would be 65 and older; *Geography*: 60 would be from Asia, 16 would be from Africa, 10 would be from Europe, 9 from Latin America & the Caribbean, 5 would be from North America; *Religion*: 31 would be Christians, 23 would be Muslims, 16 would not be religious or aligned with a particular faith, 15 would be Hindu, 7 would be Buddhist, 8 would believe in other religions; *First Language*: 12 would speak Chinese, 6 would speak Spanish, 5 would speak English, 4 would speak Hindi, 3 would speak Arabic, 3 would speak Bengali, 3 would speak Portuguese, 2 would speak Russian, 2 would speak Japanese, 60 would speak other languages; *Overall Literacy*: 86 would be able to read and write, 14 would not; *Literacy by Gender*: 90% of males would be able to read and write, 10% of males would not be able to read and write, 82% of females would be able to read and write, 18% of females would not be able to read and write; *Education*: 78% of eligible males would have a primary school education, 76% of eligible females would have a primary school education; 7 people would have a college degree; *Shelter*: 78 people would have a place to shelter them from the wind and rain, but 22 would not; *Urban/Rural*: 54 would be urban dwellers, 46 would be rural dwellers; *Drinking Water*: 91 would have access to safe drinking water, 9 would use unimproved water; *Food*: 11 would be undernourished; *Infectious Disease*: 1 would have HIV/AIDS, 1 would have tuberculosis; *Poverty*: 11 would live on less than \$1.90USD per day; *Electricity*: 82 would have electricity, 18 would not; *Technology* 65 would be cell phone users, 47 would be active internet users, 95 would live in an area with a mobile-cellular network; *Sanitation*: 68 would have improved sanitation, 14 would have no toilets, 18 would have unimproved toilets.”

50. Richard Falk, *Predatory Globalization: A Critique* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999), 1–3.

51. Among the earliest critiques of the phenomenon of globalization was Richard J. Barnet and Ronald E. Muller, *Global Reach: The Power of the Multinational Corporation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974).

raw materials, agricultural products, labor, captive markets, and new zones of tourism for the so-called “first world.”

On the other hand, globalization-from-below aims to restore to so-called “third world” communities their capacities and abilities (power and skill) to nurture and sustain intellectual, cultural, social, and ecological environments; to improve and augment access to necessary resources; and to support local, national, and transnational political institutions. At the same time, globalization-from-below queries the notion of citizenship with regard to trans/cross-border identification, belonging, and collaboration. Struggles of rural, urban poor and working poor women, men, and children for housing, health, food security, education, and land; activism for ecological protection; and advocacy by women, gay men, lesbians, transpeople, and people of color for equal protection under the law—all suggest the coming elimination of inequalities and the building up of truly humane societies.

Three caveats surface with regard to the distinction of “above” and “below.” First, we must question whether such polarities as “North and South” or “first world” and “third world” are rich and complex enough to comprehend the range of predicaments our world faces. After all, poverty, high rates of infant mortality, and incarceration are characteristic of many “first world” locales. The United States stands as a conspicuous exception: African American, Native American, and Alaska Native women are roughly three times more likely to die from causes related to pregnancy than white women.<sup>52</sup> Second, consider the notions of race, gender, class, nation, and state. These conceptual abstractions may be deployed for political or economic or ideological purposes, but they can never exhaust the full existing heterogeneities of concrete social formations, nor can they explain the lives and social predicaments of living human beings. Third, the tendency to pit economy, ethnicity, equality (of gender), or ecology against one another reflects silo-thinking and obscures the critical character of interdependence. Consider that in efforts to attract businesses and to stabilize jobs and local economies, cities or regions make concessions for corporations and surrender safeguards for the environment, precautions related to job safety, or gender equality in hiring or pay or promotion. Too often, once those concessions are attained, corporations find opportunities to break those promises. Too often, after two or three years, corporations abandon cities or regions and scout for greener pastures.

Malcolm Waters defines globalization quite precisely and pointedly: “A social process in which the constraints of geography on economic, political, social, and cultural arrangements recede, in which people become increasingly aware that they are

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52. See Roni Caryn Rabin, “Huge Racial Disparities Found in Deaths Linked to Pregnancy,” *The New York Times*, May 7, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/07/health/pregnancy-deaths-.html>; Linda Villarosa, “Why America’s Black Mothers and Babies Are in a Life-or-Death Crisis,” *The New York Times Magazine*, April 11, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/11/magazine/black-mothers-babies-death-maternal-mortality.html>.

receding and in which people act accordingly.”<sup>53</sup> Further, Bill Ashcroft argues, “we cannot understand globalization without understanding the structure of global power relations which flourishes in the twenty-first century as an economic, cultural and political legacy of Western imperialism.”<sup>54</sup> Globalization simultaneously expresses itself as an event, an idea, and a process. Even if there is little consensus regarding a precise definition, globalization remains freighted with the coalescence and exercise of dominative power.

Following Walter Mignolo, I understand globalization as coextensive with modernity and colonialism. Globalization refers to the past five hundred years of a modern world system inaugurated by “the moment in which a new type of mercantilism based on slavery emerges, with the ‘discovery’ of America, and is attached to a Christian mission”<sup>55</sup> and “framed in and by Christian theology.”<sup>56</sup> What rendered theology a tool of empire? Perhaps, we may locate this result in the collapse of dialogue and the failure to ask and pursue questions, to engage plural, even conflicting viewpoints seriously—methodological moves so characteristic of the generative work of Thomas Aquinas. Perhaps, we also may trace theology’s captivity to political, economic, and military demands and to the sad withdrawal of ecclesiastical hierarchy into an “arrogance, closely associated with corrupt power disguised as God-given authority.”<sup>57</sup> What made theology a tool of empire? Perhaps, theologians failed to cultivate the inner drive and desire for understanding and did not allow wonder to move about freely in new cultural, religious, social, and geographic contexts into which they ventured. Put differently: This breakdown of theology was due largely to sin as manifest in bias—dramatic, individual, group, and commonsense. Distorted notions of honor and ambition, of egoism and pride, of acquisitiveness and greed, and of cultural and racial superiority blinded theologians to the task of theology and to theologizing appropriately in the “new world” context.<sup>58</sup> Theology now became monolingual and monocled, demarcated and delimited, ground down by multiple communicative breakdowns that impeded the ability of theologians to authentically engage new sources and horizons.

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53. Malcolm Waters, *Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 4–5; cf. Robert Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), 4–5.

54. Bill Ashcroft, *Post-colonial Transformation* (London: Routledge, 2001), 208.

55. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 279.

56. Mignolo, “Decolonizing Western Epistemology / Building Decolonial Epistemologies,” in *Decolonial Epistemologies: Latina/o Theology and Philosophy*, ed. Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Eduardo Mendieta (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 19–43 at 27, <https://doi.org/10.5422/fordham/9780823241354.003.0002>.

57. Cecilia Francisco Tan, “The Implications of Authentic Authority for Contemporary Pastoral Leadership: An Application of Bernard Lonergan’s Dialectic of Authority” (PhD diss., University of Divinity, 2019), 155.

58. I am grateful to Benjamin Hohman, one of our doctoral students in systematic theology at Boston College, for helping me to clarify my thinking and to sharpen this paragraph.

What of theology's role in globalization at this juncture? Robert Schreiter situates theology in a context (world) shaped by globalization ("between the global and local") and explains theology's interaction with the world in terms of flow:<sup>59</sup>

Global theological flows are theological discourses that while not uniform or systemic, represent a series of linked, mutually, intelligible discourses that address the contradictions or failures of global systems. They are theological discourses, that is, they speak out of the realm of religious beliefs and practices. They are not uniform or systemic, because of their commitment to specific cultural and social settings. Yet they are intelligible to discourses in other cultural and social settings that are experiencing the same failure of global systems and are raising the same kind of protest.<sup>60</sup>

On Schreiter's account there are at least four such global theological flows in the world today: theologies of liberation, feminism, ecology, and human rights.<sup>61</sup> These theologies may be limited, specific, and dynamically fluid—a characterization applicable, if not always applied, to all theologies. But theologies of liberation, feminism, ecology, and human rights participate and collaborate praxially in disentangling and exposing the protracted and crusted contours of modern colonial power still present in and upholding globalization.

In theologizing in global contexts, theologies of liberation, for example, draw methodologically on Scripture and tradition along with critical theories and social analyses. These theologies also deploy as categories notions of culture, history, gender, sex, and sexuality. Theologies of liberation authentically meet the systematic or theoretical exigence by relying on a style of abstraction that neither disregards nor discards data or language of commonsense starting points, but rather enriches these through the use of theoretical language, adverting to terms and their relations, congruences, and differences. Further, the turn to theory opens the mind and heart to new insights that lead to revision or correction of former judgments. The systematic context promotes dialogue and conversation between and among diverse sources and traditions. Of crucial relevance is the theologian's own interiority. The specific theological principle is religious conversion or being in love with God:<sup>62</sup> "There is needed in the theologian the spiritual development that will enable him [or her] to enter into the

59. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 15.

60. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 16.

61. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 16. Gaspar Martinez analyzes key turning points and thinkers in the ongoing development of post-Vatican II Roman Catholic Theology. In his narrative, the theology of Jesuit Karl Rahner holds a pivotal role for the emergence of political theology (Metz), liberation theology (Gutierrez), and public theology (Tracy). Martinez overlooks feminist theology, thereby, missing a major internal contradiction for Catholicism. However, he does recognize the contributions of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Rosemary Radford Ruether to the public character of Catholic theology: Martinez, *Confronting the Mystery of God: Political, Liberation, and Public Theologies* (New York: Continuum, 2001).

62. Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 81–85, 237–53.

experience of others and to frame the terms and relations that will express that experience.”<sup>63</sup> The turn to interiority reinforces the move from common sense to theory; common sense data and the theoretical are drawn into a higher viewpoint in relation to a scale of values that emphasizes persons over cultural and social values, and recognizes that cultural and social values form constitutive elements in the formation of persons.<sup>64</sup>

All theologies, including theologies of liberation and of feminism, toy with hegemony when they locate the power and authority of reason not in the disinterested drive and desire for understanding, but in possession of it. We theologians who take as starting points for theologizing the religious, cultural, and social experience of oppressed, excluded, and minoritized persons must make self-critique a necessary element of our theological praxis.<sup>65</sup>

### “Turn to the Person”: Reorienting US Theological Praxis in a World Church

The various theological shifts described in the first section and the implicit cautions in the second may serve both as a consolation and a challenge. The knowledge that change is possible, that we may reorient our theological praxis consoles. Yet, scrutiny of the “the signs of the times,” discerning just what might be required in reorienting our theological praxis, and critically understanding the compound-complex geo-social and cultural context that forms the horizon into which many of us have been born and within which we work, offers a formidable challenge.

My proposal for reorienting our theological praxis is this: “turn theology to persons.”<sup>66</sup> The “turn to the subject” in the context of the European Enlightenment was intended to be emancipatory. It aimed to release humanity to dare to rely upon reason, rather than revealed truth, as the authority by which to judge, decide, and act. But, humanity’s “exit”<sup>67</sup> from its “self-incurred immaturity”<sup>68</sup> was no progress. From the

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63. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 290.

64. Again, my thanks to Benjamin Hohman.

65. Lonergan, *Insight, A Study of Human Understanding*, 5th ed., ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, Collected Works 3 (1957; repr., Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 230.

66. The homily given by Pope Francis in Poland, on the occasion of World Youth Day, included this comment: “People may judge you to be dreamers, because you *believe in a new humanity*, one that rejects hatred between peoples, one that refuses to see borders as barriers and can cherish its own traditions without being self-centered or small-minded.” Francis, homily for World Youth Day (Kraków, Poland, July 31, 2016), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2016/documents/papa-francesco\\_20160731\\_omelia-polonia-gmg.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20160731_omelia-polonia-gmg.html).

67. Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas*, 20.

68. Immanuel Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’,” in *Kant’s Political Writings*, trans. H. B. Nisbet, ed. Hans Reiss, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 54–60 at 54.

middle of the fifteenth century forward, a totalizing dynamic of domination, already obvious in anti-Semitism and misogyny, made itself felt in the so-called “new worlds” through colonialism and genocide, cultural imperialism and racism.

These dominative dynamics absorbed Christianity and Christian theology into empire. At times willingly, ambivalently, actively, silently, Christianity partnered in that domination. This complicity, no matter how fleeting or how superficial, compromised Christian theology’s reverence, regard, and defense of the human. Yet, Christianity’s relation to the global anthropological deformation that resulted in what Sylvia Wynter calls the “Doctrine of Man”<sup>69</sup> is as deep as its relation to the global transformative social praxis inspired by the critical recovery of the memory of the life, death, and resurrection of the Jewish Jesus of Nazareth and articulated in liberation and decolonizing theologies in various social and cultural contexts of oppression.<sup>70</sup>

Why “person”? The *subject* is abstract, bloodless, disembodied, deracinated, and distant. The person is tangible and solid, flesh and blood, material and embodied; rooted in space and time, in culture and relationships. The *person* is close—so close she or he can be smelled, heard, touched, seen, even tasted. Persons are plural, many, diverse, different, at one and the same time so very alike *and* unlike one another. Persons involve food and drink, shelter and clothing, sex and desire, sleep and dreams; they constitute themselves and their realities with each judgment and decision, each articulation and performance of the meanings and values of their reality, their history and context.<sup>71</sup> Persons endure colonialism and suffer genocide; stomach cultural imperialism; undergo racism and anti-Semitism and Islamophobia; endure sexism and heterosexism and transphobia. Persons suffer these crimes against “the other,” suffer these social sins and intrinsic evils. God is offended: These are sins against the divine image in each human creature; these are blasphemous sins of idolatry.

If the function of “a theology is to mediate between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of religion in that matrix,”<sup>72</sup> then “turning theology to persons” may

69. Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument,” *The New Centennial Review* 3 (2003): 257–337, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ncr.2004.0015>; see Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), esp. 1–21, 35–40.

70. In her *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) Iris Marion Young proffers a clarification of categories that oppression that occur in liberal societies like our own. These are exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and random violence.

71. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 31–32; Olga Consuelo Vélez Caro, “Toward a Feminist Intercultural Theology,” in *Feminist Intercultural Theology: Latina Explorations for a Just World*, ed. Pilar Aquino and Maria José Rosada-Nunes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2007), 248–64 at 260.

72. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, xi.



realize a theology of transformation for the sake of theology itself and for the sake of transforming the Body of Christ. Here are seven tasks in reorienting our theological praxis to meet the challenges of our time.

First, *turning theology to persons*, placing persons at the center of our theological reflection, compels us to ask, “Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:25–37 NRSV). This is a crucial question for Christian theologians living in the United States at this juncture. We must face up to the unexplained, unaccounted for, unadmonished deaths of black and brown human persons at the hands of police officers or under suspicious circumstances while in police custody or during police tactical responses.<sup>73</sup> Their deaths, increased privatization and growth of the prison industrial complex, high rates of incarceration, particularly, among black and brown male (and female) youth, and the criminalization of poverty signal the most egregious manifestations of breakdown in our culture and the collapse of the system of criminal justice in the United States.<sup>74</sup>

We must face up to the unexplained, unaccounted for, unadmonished deaths of migrant children caged in our detention centers. We must never forget Darlyn Cristabel Cordova-Valle, 10, from El Salvador; Jakelin Caal Maquín, 7, Guatemala; Felipe Gomez Alonzo, 8, Guatemala; Juan de León Gutiérrez, 16, Guatemala; Wilmer Josué Ramírez Vásquez, 2½, Guatemala; and Carlos Hernandez Vásquez, 16, Guatemala.<sup>75</sup>

Theology “turned to persons” in the US presses us to advance critical analyses of white racist supremacy in all its forms—anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, anti-Semitic, anti-LGBTQI, anti-woman, anti-black. We must take as our own the challenge thrown down by James Hal Cone years ago: to develop an enduring, comprehensive, and memorable critique of white racist supremacy. We must resist the impunity with which black bodies have been disregarded and, in accord with the ancient Christian sense of the term, *witness* that black lives matter, that all life, all lives, all human persons

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73. Here are names of some of the dead: Andy Lopez in Santa Rosa, California, Eric Garner in Staten, Island, Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, Tamir Rice in Cleveland, Ohio, Walter Scott in North Charleston, South Carolina, Freddie Gray in Baltimore, Maryland, Sandra Bland in Waller County, Texas, Aiyana Stanley-Jones in Detroit, Reika Boyd in Chicago, Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Philandro Castillo in St. Paul, Minnesota. On June 17, 2015, nine Christians engaged in Bible study in Mother Emanuel (AME) Church, Charleston, South Carolina, were shot to death by lone white gunman Dylaan Roof. The dead are: Sharonda Coleman-Singleton, Depayne Doctor, Cynthia Hurd, Susie Jackson, Ethel Lance, Clementa Pinckney, Tywanza Sanders, Daniel Simmons Sr., and Mira Thompson.

74. See Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2010); William J. Stuntz, *The Collapse of American Criminal Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2011).

75. Molly Hennessy-Fiske, “Six Migrant Children Have Died in U.S. Custody: Here’s What We Know about Them,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 24, 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-migrant-child-border-deaths-20190524-story.html/>.

matter. Of course, all life, all lives, all human persons matter!<sup>76</sup> Robert Putnam and David Campbell indict believers of every stripe: “Just as religious Americans have not been in the vanguard of concern over income equality, they have not led the way in racial tolerance. Social connections across class and racial lines do not necessarily inspire action to increase social justice.”<sup>77</sup> We must put forward an adequately complex and comprehensive analysis of the structure of white racist supremacy—a critical analysis that accounts for its shape-shifting in economic or political or cultural routines or procedures to foster pseudo-equality, to deprecate the humanity of others, to distort the ideals of the nation, to warp the life of the Body of Christ.

Second, theology “turned to persons” in its attention to method *engages multiple disciplines*: scriptural exegesis, aesthetics (performance and theory), comparative literatures, critical geography, critical social, race, and legal theories, economics, history, philosophy, poetry, political science, psychology—without allowing our specifically theological contribution to be defined or co-opted by these necessary disciplines. In this interdisciplinary setting, our theological contribution, indeed, our mission is to remind all comers that living women and men cannot and must not be reduced to statistics or illustrations of this or that sociological or political or economic or psychological problem or theory. Theology mediates the word of God within the most dire as well as hope-filled circumstances, to protect the transcendent character of the human, to guard the “image of God” in each person.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, in focusing critical attention on the very problems that tend to reduce human persons to statistics (e.g., poverty, hunger, environmental and ecological disasters, injustices leveled against women, bigoted immigration policies, and gendered, sexual, racial, physical “othering”), a theology turned to persons insinuates a higher viewpoint on the human while reinforcing the social scientist’s or literary critic’s or psychologist’s or economist’s detached and disinterested desire to know. Such a theology supports the critical search for intelligent, reasonable, and responsible solutions to human problems. Such theologizing

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76. Here are names of some of the dead: Brent Thompson, Patrick Zamarripa, Michael Krol, Lorne Ahrens, and Michael Smith—five police officers shot and killed by lone black gunman, Micah Johnson on July 7, 2016; three Baton Rouge police officers—Matthew Gerald, Montrell Jackson, and Brad Garafola shot and killed by black gunman, Gavin Long on July 17, 2016.

77. Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 319.

78. For a critique of the usual contrast between the “transcendent” and the “immanent” in theology, and the implications of these categories for theological method, see Mark Lewis Taylor, *The Theological and the Political: On the Weight of the World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 125–128. Methods for theology “turned to persons” (theology as political) might include critique of ideology, especially the ideology of white supremacy and the ideologization of Christianity; visual theology or documentaries; intersectional analysis; cultural and social analyses, i.e., interrogations of the modes, functions, relations, and operations of the mental and material structures that subjugate the poor and reproduce and sustain white (male) supremacy.

may be read as countercolonial theology, theology that grasps the density of colonial reason and, thus, seeks to learn from and restore subaltern knowledge.<sup>79</sup>

Meeting our theological responsibilities to and for human persons necessitates the third task in reorienting theology as a *transdisciplinary discourse that is intercultural, plural, and countercolonial*.<sup>80</sup> This entails understanding culture as a “set of meanings and values informing a common way of life, and there are as many cultures as there are distinct sets of such meanings and values.”<sup>81</sup> Yet, despite acceptance of such plurality and diversity, the classicist ideal of culture as synonymous with Western European culture persists, as does the view that Western European culture remains universal and normative. As Juan José Tamayo-Acosta points out,

despite all efforts at dialogue (such a notion of culture) still holds sway in the collective imagery of Christian individuals and groups, especially westerners, in the minds of theologians, in many evangelization projects, even those that are “liberated” and inculturated, in the organization of the churches and in the way churches are run from the center.<sup>82</sup>

As discourse that values the intercultural and culturally plural, theology “turned to persons” engages in intercultural dialogue. As Olga Consuelo Vélez Caro states ever so clearly, “Intercultural dialogue is a tremendous hermeneutical challenge. It means accepting that the interpretation of reality is plural, and that such plurality is true.”<sup>83</sup> Raúl Fornet-Betancourt has worked out some epistemological presuppositions for intercultural dialogue:

- First, eradicating the conceptual hegemony of any culture that seeks to oblige all that is strange to conform to its norms.
- Second, relativizing knowledge within the exclusive domain of rationality and entering into the existential dimension of the other. Mutual exchange cannot be limited to the conceptual level, but must open itself up to understanding the other in his/her life and his/her corporality.
- Third, attempting to practice a respective understanding that minimizes the habits of subsumption and reduction that ethnocentrism tends to create in the exercise of intelligence.
- And, finally, cultivating the terrain of the “inter,” where every hasty definition is an error, just as every precipitous declaration of harmony may be an underhanded expression of domination.<sup>84</sup>

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79. Mignolo, “Decolonizing Western Epistemology,” 26.

80. Taylor, *The Theological and the Political*, 152–153; Vélez Caro, “Toward a Feminist Intercultural Theology”; Rieger, *Christ and Empire*, 6–7.

81. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 301.

82. Quoted in Vélez Caro, “Toward a Feminist Intercultural Theology,” 249–50.

83. Vélez Caro, “Toward a Feminist Intercultural Theology,” 250.

84. Quoted in Vélez Caro, “Toward a Feminist Intercultural Theology,” 250–52; cf. Schreier, *The New Catholicity*, 28–61.

Intercultural dialogue presents a new possibility in theology “turned to persons.” It makes room for *all* bodies and strives for the transformation of our broken world. Such dialogue and encounter depend upon personal integrity, reverence for the life and dignity of the concrete human “other,” sincere and empathetic curiosity, patience, humility, attentive listening, truthful speech, and “open[ness] to the notion that human existence is always changing and evolving [and] is unfinished business.”<sup>85</sup>

Fourth, a theology “turned to persons” promotes and supports *anamnestic solidarity*. Solidarity is basic to realization of the very meaning of humanness. Inasmuch as solidarity involves an attitude or disposition, it entails active recognition of the humanness of the “other” as human and regard for the “other” in her (and his) own “otherness.” Anamnestic solidarity engages active memory of the dead, the victims of history. This memory is neither morbid nor romantic; rather it mobilizes us to resistance and justice. For solidarity compels us to place our “whole [selves]—as acting, feeling, understanding, interpreting, valuing, embodied”<sup>86</sup> other-directed, knowing, loving human persons at the disposal of “a justice-praxis for members of our species and the wider environment in which we are situated in order to resist conditions that thwart life, arriving at new understandings of our doing, knowing, and being.”<sup>87</sup>

A fifth task in reorienting our theological practice involves critical appreciation for and cultivation of the *aesthetic*. The notion of aesthetics need not be chiefly passive or visual; aesthetics tutors all the senses (sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch), refreshes in play and humor, and does not fear to mourn in liberation of mind and body and spirit for life.

Sixth, in order to reorient our theological practice authentically, we must *till, nurture, and water the fragile soil of our souls* with Eucharist, prayer, fasting, sacrifice, intentional relinquishment, and hope. We do Christian theology because we want to collaborate in a most fundamental way in bringing about a different kind of world in the here-and-now. Yet, to do this, our contribution is to think about that here-and-now in light of the eschatological future that only God can give. We advocate for the reign of God. Our ultimate commitment can never be to system or structure, person or group, church or university, but to the God of the crucified Jewish Jesus of Nazareth. His prophetic praxis, in the face of certain death, demonstrates the risk and meaning of a life lived in prayerful hope.

A seventh task in reorienting our theological praxis is *love* (charity), that virtue that enables us to love God and our neighbors more than ourselves. Martin Luther King, Jr. called for *agape*, that self-sacrificing love of neighbor needed for the creative transformation of society.<sup>88</sup> Love, Chela Sandoval tells us, enacts a

85. Michele Saracino, *Being about Borders: A Christian Anthropology of Difference* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2011), 140.

86. Wendy Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion: A Contemporary Theodicy* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 74.

87. Katie Geneva Cannon, *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 141.

88. John Ansbro, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Making of A Mind* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1984), 1.

“hermeneutics of social change, a decolonizing *movida*.”<sup>89</sup> For authentic love reveals itself concretely in option and action; it calls for the radical disposal of self for, on behalf of, and with the other and those others whom society tolerates, despises, and excludes. Love answers in concrete practical action the question, “Who is the neighbor?” The neighbor is whoever is denounced, dismissed, and discarded because of age or infirmity, or being differently abled, or religious or political affiliation, or culture or race or ethnicity, or gender or sex or sexual orientation, or economic or social class or cultural impoverishment. In short, the neighbor is whoever is weak, repressed, forgotten, victimized, and excluded; whoever has been made to feel that her or his life is trivial, dispensable, and does not matter in the modern/colonial/global design. These are the little ones whom the Holy Three cherish and embrace as their very own.

## Conclusion

This essay has extended Stephen Bevans’s thesis that “Christian theologizing is not now and never has been a monolithic, purely Western reality, but from the beginning has been pluriform and multicultural in shape,”<sup>90</sup> and attentive to and responsive to the context from within which it emerges. I have raised some questions about theology in light of globalization. Finally, I have put forward a proposal “to turn theology to the person.” This proposal combines and focuses doctrine (theological anthropology), method (transdisciplinary), ethics (anamnesic solidarity), and spirituality (the transformation of the theologian) to bring into being (in both print and practice) a theology of transformation that situates the starting point of our intellectual praxis at the foot of the cross of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth for the sake of the healing and transformation of his Body.

## Author Biography

M. Shawn Copeland (PhD, Boston College) is professor *emerita* at Boston College. Specializing in political theology and theological anthropology, with special attention to social oppression and social suffering, gender, anti-racism, and religious experience, she has recently published *Knowing Christ Crucified: The Witness of African American Religious Experience* (2018). In progress is a theological commentary on the book of the Jeremiah.

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89. Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 143.

90. Bevans, *An Introduction to Theology*, 205.